

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Case File No.: AA-79877

EA No.: AK-040-99-044

Type of
Action: Mining Claim Occupancy

Location: T. 26 N., R. 42 W., Section 12, SM

Applicant: L.E. Wyrick
2440 East Tudor #1033
Anchorage, Alaska 99627

Prepared By: Carl Persson

Preparing
Office: Bureau of Land Management
Anchorage Field Office
6881 Abbott Loop Road
Anchorage, Alaska 99507

Date: September 13, 1999

I. INTRODUCTION

On April 26, 1999, the Anchorage Field Office received an Alaska Placer Mining Application from Mr. L.E. Wyrick. Residential occupancy is listed as a necessary component of his mining operation. In October of 1996, Mr. Wyrick called this office for notification of an existing occupancy on a Federal mining claim.

Mr. Wyrick holds unpatented Federal mining claims on Granite Creek, a tributary of the George River, Alaska. The property is only accessible by aircraft.

He and his family have been conducting medium scale placer mining operations on Granite Creek since 1987. He has occasionally had a hired helper. The claims were staked in 1984. The mining operation uses a 640 B Backhoe, D8 bulldozer, D6 B bulldozer, and a sluicebox. He has filed a 3809 mining notice through the State of Alaska Placer Mining Application process most years since 1987. The property has seen limited activity the last several years.

A. Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action:

Mr. L.E. Wyrick has requested an occupancy authorization for continuing use and occupancy in order to conduct ongoing gold placer mining activities on his Federal mining claims.

B. Conformance With Land Use Plan:

The proposed mining claim occupancy is within lands included in the Southwest Planning Area MFP, signed November 1981. One of the plan objectives (objective M-2), states that the Bureau provide opportunities for the development of locatable minerals throughout the planning area to meet the national demands for precious and strategic minerals. The Proposed Action is in conformance with this land use plan objective.

C. Relationship to Statutes, Regulations, Policies, Plans or Other Environmental Analyses:

The regulations for authorizing occupancies on Federal mining claims are established in 43 CFR 3715. As established by regulation, the NEPA analysis for mining claim occupancy authorization is considered separately from the 3809 Surface Management Regulations which considers mining impacts.

II. PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

A. Proposed Action:

The Proposed Action is to continue the mining claim use and occupancy of existing structures for L.E. Wyrick and his family, in order for him to conduct placer mining activities on his Federal mining claims. The occupancy site consists of approximately one acre of cleared and leveled land containing a two story log cabin plus a trailer/workshop. A pit outhouse is used to deal with human waste.

Kitchen water is piped out to sump pits. There is no proposal to build new structures on the mining claims. In order for Mr. Wyrick to continue the use and occupancy of the structures on his Federal mining claims, BLM must issue an occupancy authorization. The structures are within Section 12, T. 26 N., R. 42 W, Seward Meridian.

Access can be achieved by landing an aircraft on a 4,000 foot gravel airstrip located on the claims. The proposed duration for the occupancy would be May 1 through October 1, 1999.

B. No Action Alternative:

The only alternative is the No Action Alternative. Under this alternative the BLM would not authorize the proposed occupancy.

III. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

A. Critical Elements:

There would be no impacts to the following critical elements: Air Quality; ACECs; Environmental Justice; Farmlands; Floodplains; Invasive, Nonnative Species; Native American Religious Concerns; Threatened and Endangered Species; Wetlands/Riparian Zones; Wild and Scenic Rivers; Subsistence; or Wilderness.

1. Cultural:

The structures were constructed in the mid-1980's by Mr. Wyrick for mining purposes. The structures have never been formally evaluated for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places, and due to their relatively recent age, will not be formally evaluated.

2. Subsistence:

No change in Federal Subsistence Management Program authority or implementation would occur from the Proposed Action. The Proposed Action will not significantly restrict subsistence uses, decrease the abundance of subsistence resources, alter the distribution of resources, or limit subsistence user access from currently existing conditions.

B. Vegetation

The vegetation consists mainly of black spruce, alder, willow, fireweed and various grasses. Most of the land adjacent to the cabins consists of tailings and settling ponds from past and present mining. The surrounding uplands are composed of undisturbed black spruce forest and tundra. Most of the surrounding drainages have never been subject to placer mining in the past.

C. Wildlife:

Wildlife in the area includes moose, caribou, black and brown bears, wolves, and various birds and small mammals. Regional wildlife densities are moderately low. A few salmon do migrate up Granite Creek.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

A. Impacts of the Proposed Action:

There would be impacts to water quality from the production of grey water through kitchen and household activities. Grey water is usually disposed of through pipes leading to a cribbed sump pit where it would migrate down, merge, and be quickly diluted by the local groundwater.

Minor amounts of solid household and human waste would be produced. Household waste would consist primarily of kitchen waste. Minor amounts of household hazardous waste would be generated, primarily from the use of household cleaners and solvents. Pit outhouses would be used to deal with human waste. Occasionally, new pits would have to be dug and the outhouses moved.

Brush in the immediate vicinity of the structures would be cleared and the existing structures maintained. Structures create an elevated need for wild-land fire protection for the area. The existence of structures usually results in a designation of a full suppression level of fire management in the local fire protection management plan.

The presence of food or improperly disposed garbage will occasionally attract bears. Every once in a while a bear must be shot if it stays around and becomes a potential hazard. Some of the local miners will harvest a moose in the fall for subsistence purposes. There is approximately one acre of lost habitat, principally impacting small mammals and birds, created by the occupancy. Additionally, the noise and activity associated with the occupancy will tend to cause many wildlife species to avoid the site and relocate to other areas. However, there is no shortage of similar habitat in the region for impacted species to relocate to.

B. Impacts of the No Action Alternative:

The principal impact of not authorizing the requested mining claim occupancy is there would be no Wyrick family occupancy on their Federal mining claims. Because of the remoteness of this location, mining is unlikely without a mining claim occupancy authorization. There is no local alternative housing or realistic

opportunity to commute to the property. Additional impacts would be that brush in the immediate vicinity of the structures would not be cleared and the existing structures would not be maintained.

- C. Cumulative Impacts:
There would be no cumulative impacts of the occupancy to local resources.

V. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

- A. List of Preparers:
Carl Persson, Geologist (Certified Mineral Examiner #035)
Jeff Denton, Subsistence Coordinator
Bruce Seppi, T&E Species Coordinator
Donna Redding, Archeologist
Dave Kelley, 3809 Surface Management Coordinator